

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
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R 101849EMAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9733
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
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USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 1243

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y ADD EO, TAGS, SUBJ.

MEXICO AND SAN JOSE ALSO FOR DEA

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PBOR, SNAR, SHUM, HO NU
SUBJ: ARMED FORCES CHIEF HOLDS PRESS CONFERENCE

REF: (A) TEGUCIGALPA 1180 (DTG 071730,5 -4 'ILN (B) TEGUCIGALPA
1204 (DTG 081805Z MAR 78), (C) TEGUCIGALPA 0043 (DTG 041945Z
JAN 78) (NOTAL)

1. HONDURAN ARMED FORCES COMMANDER IN CHIEF, GENERAL POLICARPO
PAZ, ALONG WITH MILITARY INTELLIGENCE CHIEF, LT.COL. LEONIDAS TORRES
ARIAS, MET WITH THE PRESS MARCH 8 FOR OVER FIVE HOURS. PAZ DIS-
CUSSED THREE ISSUES: THE FERRARI CASE, NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING,
AND THE HONDURAN-NICARAGUAN BORDAR.

2. PAZ DENIED THAT THE ARMED FORCES WERE INVOLVED IN THE FERRARI
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DISAPPEARANCE OR THAT ANY MILITARY UNIT HAD ARRESTED OR HED THE
COUPLE. ATTEMPTING TO CLEAR UP A PREVIOUS MISUNDERSTANDING THAT HAD
SERVED TO RAISE PRESS DOUBTS, PAZ EXPLAINED THAT TORRES ARIAS
TOLD THE PRESS IN DECEMBER THE FERRARI'S WERE NOT KIDNAPPED BE-
CAUSE HE HAD UNDERSTOOD FROM THEN NATIONAL INVESTIGATION DIREC-
TOR MAJOR ARMANDO CALIDONIO THAT THEY WERE IN CUSTODY. HOWEVER,

CALIDONIO ALLEGEDLY WAS REFERRING TO AN ARREST PREVIOUS TO THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE COUPLE AND HADN'T TOLD TORRES ARIAS THAT FERRARI HAD ALREADY BEEN RELEASED. (NEITHER PAZ NOR TORRES EXPLAINED WHY THIS WAS NOT ADDRESSED UNTIL NOW.) PAZ ALSO SAID THAT INSTRUCTIONS HAD BEEN GIVEN FOR THE INVESTIGATION TO BE VIGOROUSLY PURSUED AND PROMISED THAT IF MILITARY OR POLICE OFFICIALS WERE FOUND TO BE INVOLVED THEY WOULD BE PUNISHED. HE ALSO DENIED THE EXISTENCE OF A SECRET REPORT (REF A) NAMING THREE MILITARY OFFICERS.

3. ACCORDING TO PAZ, HONDURAS IS BECOMING A MAJOR CENTER FOR NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING. HE ADMITTED THAT THERE MIGHT POSSIBLY BE CORRUPTION IN THE POLICE FORCES BECAUSE OF THE TREMENDOUS TEMPTATIONS. HE ALSO CLAIMED THAT NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING THROUGH HONDURAS INVOLVED OVER ONE BILLION DOLLARS, BUT DID NOT CITE BASIS FOR THIS FUGURE. RAMON MATA BALLESTEROS, WHOSE WHEARABOUTS NOW UNKNOWN AND WHO HAS BEEN LINKED TO THE FERRARI'S WAS IDENTIFIED AS ONE OF THE LEADING NARCOTICS TRAFFICERS IN HONDURAS.

4. PAZ DENIED THAT THE HONDURAN ARMED FORCES WERE CARRYING OUT A JOINT OPERATION WITH THE NICARAGUAN NATIONAL GUARD. HE DID ADMIT THAT AN "OPERATION VELOZ" (REF B) WAS BEING IMPLEMENTED BY THE HONDURAN MILITARY INVOLVING PATROLS OF THE BORDER AREA. PAZ REPEATED CHIEF OF STATE GENERAL MELGAR'S NEW YEAR STATEMENT (REF C) THAT THE GOH WOULD NEITHER ALLOW THE FSLN TO USE HONDURAS AS A SANCTUARY, NOR ALLOW THE NATIONAL GUARD TO USE IT AS A HUNTING GROUND AND (CORRECTLY) CITED ARRESTS OF SANDINISTAS AND GUARD PATROLS. HE DENIED WHAT HE DESCRIBED AS THE GON'S BELIEF

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THAT THE GOH COOPERATES WITH THE FSLN.

5. THE TWO MILITARY OFFICERS ALSO ACCUSED THE PRESS OF SENSATIONALISM AND A CAMPAIGN TO DISTORT OF THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF THE ARMED FORCES. THIS CHARGE WAS DENIED BY THE MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES WHO POINTED OUT THAT THEY WERE REFLECTING PUBLIC CONCERN OVER A SERIES OF UNEXPLAINED EVENTS INVOLVING SECURITY FORCES.

6. COMMENT: PAZ'S STATEMENTS ADD ONLY A FEW NEW ELEMENTS TO WHAT IS ALREADY KNOWN, BUT THEY INDICATE THE SERIOUSNESS WITH WHICH THE GOH VIEWS THESE ISSUES.

JARAMILLO

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